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# **Iraq's Shias: Saddam Blunts A Potential Threat**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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*NESA 84-10294  
November 1984*

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# **Iraq's Shias: Saddam Blunts A Potential Threat**

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis,  
[redacted] by the  
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the Directorate of Operations. [redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division,  
[redacted]

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**Key Judgments**

*Information available  
as of 18 October 1984  
was used in this report.*

The chances of a major Shia insurrection in Iraq appear remote during the next several years so long as the Iranians cannot win a decisive victory in the war with Iraq and Iraqi President Saddam Husayn remains in power. Saddam appears to have built a strong base of support among Iraq's 8 million Shias by employing an astute combination of force and ethnic politics to counter Tehran's appeals for a Shia revolution. Sporadic Shia terrorist activity against the Iraqi Government and the facilities and personnel of other countries—including the United States—perceived as supporting Baghdad will continue, but it is likely to have only a limited effect on internal Iraqi politics.

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Previously oppressed or ignored by Iraq's Sunni ruling class, the Shias under Saddam have begun to play a more important role in Iraqi society:

- Saddam has drawn large numbers of Shias into the ranks of the ruling Ba'th Party, from which they were formerly excluded. For the first time in 20 years, Shias constitute a majority of the party's governing body.
- Shias hold prominent positions in the government, and we believe 40 percent of the membership of Iraq's National Assembly is Shia.
- According to our estimates, economic policies adopted by Saddam have improved the living standards of the Shias tenfold.

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In addition, hundreds of thousands of Shias have been inducted into the Army, and many others have risen to senior positions in the officer corps, previously almost exclusively a Sunni preserve. Iraq could not continue the war with Iran without the support of the Shias, who make up 80 percent of the enlisted and noncommissioned officer ranks of Iraq's armed forces.

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Baghdad has moved vigorously to co-opt Iraqi Shia clerics by making them paid employees of the state. At the same time, Saddam continues to ruthlessly repress Shia opposition. A massive security crackdown begun in 1980 and continuing to the present appears to have destroyed most clandestine Shia opposition networks in Iraq, leaving only isolated terrorist cells. Tens of thousands of Iranian Shias living in Iraq have been expelled and potential Shia opposition leaders imprisoned or executed.

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If Saddam survives the war, we believe that the Shias will become even more fully integrated into Iraqi politics and society. A strong, stable Iraq could act as a powerful magnet for Western economic investment and also as a buffer against Iran's attempts to export its revolution—thus furthering US objectives in the Persian Gulf.

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In the event of a successful military coup led by Sunni officers against Saddam, we do not believe the Shias will automatically support his successor. Unless Saddam's successor can reassure the Shias that the gains achieved by them during Saddam's rule will be preserved, Shia discontent is likely to threaten the central government.

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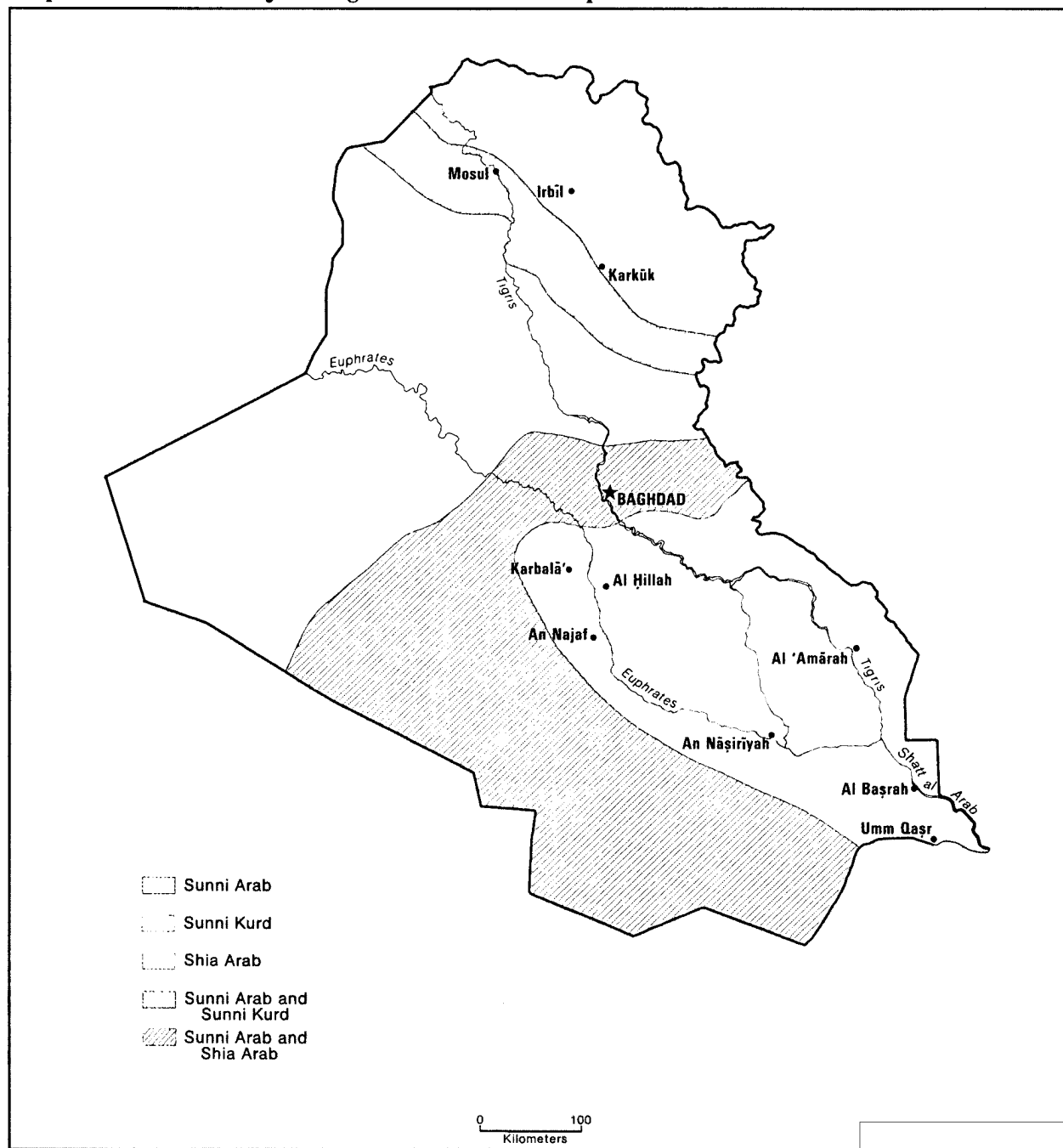
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## **Iraq's Shias: Saddam Blunts A Potential Threat**

The longstanding hostility of Iraqi Shias toward the government in Baghdad has been one of the more serious problems President Saddam Husayn has had to overcome during the war with Iran. Shias comprise about 55 percent of Iraq's 15 million population and are concentrated in southern Iraq near major oilfields and along the major road and rail links to the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi Government, however, is controlled by Sunni Arabs from northwest Iraq who make up only about 25 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> Historically the Shia majority has been discriminated against by the powerful Sunni Muslims that have run the country. The Shias express their dissatisfaction in a popular saying, "The roads and mail are for the Sunnis, the taxes for the Shias."

In the late 1970s Saddam faced what appeared to be an incipient Shia revolt fueled by the revolution in neighboring Iran. He defused this potentially destructive situation by launching a crackdown on militants within the Shia community. Once the threat passed, Saddam set about to reverse the pattern of discrimination against Iraqi Shias and to redress many of their longstanding grievances against the central government. The conciliation phase, in our judgment, is still going on.

Saddam's Shia policy has been called a successful example of conflict management and ethnic politics by US diplomats in Baghdad. The payoff has been an increase in Shia allegiance toward his government. This is of crucial importance during the present war with Iran. We estimate that 80 percent of Iraqi enlisted men and noncommissioned officers are Shias.

### **Employing the Stick Against Militant Shias**

The resentment of Iraqi Shias toward Baghdad exploded in serious internal disturbances before the war with Iran. In February 1977 violent clashes with the police occurred during a religious march by some 6,000 Shias between the holy cities of An Najaf and

### ***Iraq's Shias: Long Outside the Mainstream***

*The Shias are a minority sect of Islam that many orthodox Sunnis consider heretical. The stronghold of the Shia sect is Iran, where Shias compose 98 percent of the population. The largest Shia community outside Iran is in Iraq, but Iraqi Shias are Arabs, not Persians.*

*Under the rule of the Sunni Ottoman Turks in the 19th century, leading Shia clerics in Iraq—most of them Persian—refused to cooperate with the Turkish governor in Baghdad and instead looked to Iran for support and guidance. When the British took over Iraq following World War I and established a Sunni monarchy, Shia religious leaders remained uncooperative, and many were expelled to Iran. Thereafter, Iraq's monarchy largely ignored the Shias. Up to the end of World War II, only three Shias served in Iraqi cabinets.*

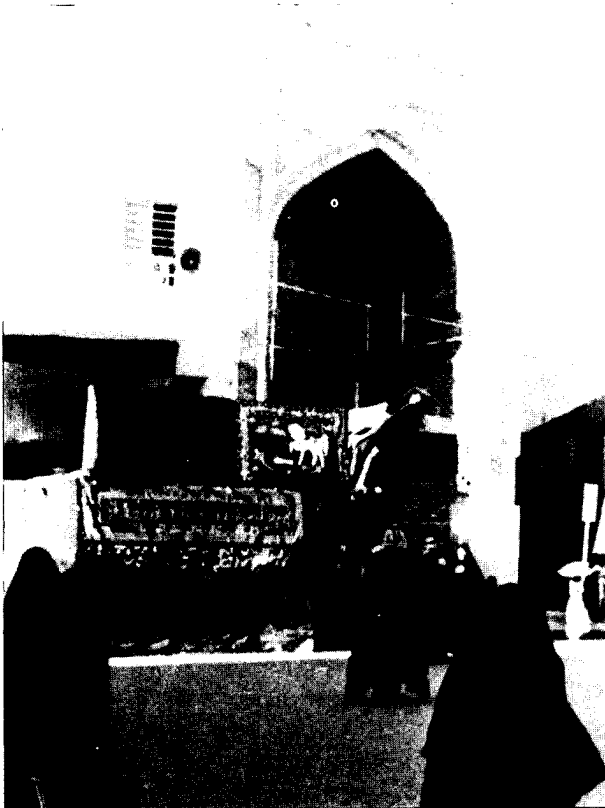
*Shias also were inhibited from participating in the Iraqi Government by their lack of secular education. Shia clerics forbade their followers from obtaining schooling under the Turks and later the British. Sunni Arabs, who did attend secular schools, received most posts in the bureaucracy and held on to these after the Iraqi republic was established in 1958. Hence, Sunnis came to dominate the Iraqi Government.*

*Shia political fortunes revived a bit in the early 1960s because the first Iraqi President, Abd al-Karim Kassem, had a Shia mother. In addition, when Kassem legalized the Communist Party, its members concentrated their organizational activities in the Shia slums. Kassem, however, was overthrown in 1963, and the Shias' political fortunes fell. They did not revive—in our judgment—until Saddam took over the presidency in 1979.*

<sup>1</sup> The remaining 20 percent of the population consists mainly of Sunni Kurds.



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Karbala, Iraq procession by Shia sect [redacted]



A Shia religious observance outside Karbala [redacted]

Karbala. [redacted] a handful of demonstrators were killed and an estimated 1,000 arrested. Saddam Husayn subsequently ordered the execution of eight Shias held responsible for provoking the unrest.<sup>2</sup> [redacted]

In 1979, following Khomeini's successful revolution in Iran, disturbances again broke out in the Shia areas of Iraq. Antigovernment demonstrations started in An Najaf and Karbala and this time spread to Baghdad. The government hanged at least 56 Shia demonstrators after crushing the outbursts, according to US diplomats, but Shia dissidence continued. Iraqi security forces discovered arms caches in several major cities, including Baghdad, and Shia activists assassinated Iraqi Government and security officials during

<sup>2</sup> During this period Saddam was the number-two man in the government, behind President Ahmad Hasan Bakr. General Bakr, however, left most of the day-to-day affairs to Saddam because of illness. The two men complemented each other well. Bakr, as a general, maintained the loyalty of the military, while Saddam controlled the country's security apparatus. Bakr stepped down in 1979, after which Saddam became President. [redacted]

the spring and summer of 1980, according to reliable sources. These incidents were highlighted by an assassination attempt against now Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz and attacks on government-sponsored demonstrations in early May that resulted in civilian casualties. [redacted]

Saddam reacted ruthlessly. Baghdad's attitude was summarized by a remark made by Tariq Aziz to a US journalist following a series of violent Shia demonstrations. According to US diplomats, Aziz said, "If there are those in this country who seek martyrdom, my government is prepared to accommodate them—all of them." Saddam's actions against the Shias took two forms: mass expulsions and widespread arrests and executions. [redacted]

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**Expulsions.** According to US diplomats, Iraqi security forces determined through the interrogation of Shia activists arrested for taking part in terrorist attacks that Shias of Iranian descent living in Iraq were a major cause of the Shia unrest. As a result, some 35,000 Shias of Iranian descent who had not obtained Iraqi citizenship were expelled during the spring of 1980. This constituted approximately one-eighth of all Iranian Shias then living in Iraq, according to US diplomats. [redacted]

The expulsions were handled very harshly, [redacted] [redacted] The deportees' personal possessions were confiscated, and they were allowed to leave the country with only about \$200 each. In one instance, according to US diplomats, attendees at a meeting of the Iraqi Chamber of Commerce in Baghdad during April 1980 were divided into two groups, Arab Iraqis and Iraqis of Iranian ancestry. The Iraqis of Iranian origin then were placed on trucks and taken to the border where they were expelled without baggage, families, or recourse.<sup>3</sup> [redacted]

Baghdad has continued to expel small groups of Iraqis of Iranian descent throughout the war. The latest sizable expulsion occurred in mid-July 1984 and involved about 150 people, according to an Iranian press report. The Shias of Iranian origin generally are trucked to Kurdistan and then forced across the border into Iran. [redacted]

In part, the mass expulsions have been used to deprive Shia activists of a friendly environment in which to operate and find recruits. The deportations also serve as a vivid reminder to other Shias of their fate should the regime perceive them as a potential fifth column. Moreover, we believe the expulsions are popular with some members of the Arab Shia community who use them to take over businesses and buy up houses, cars, and goods at bargain prices. [redacted]

**Smashing Dawa.** In addition to expelling Shias of Iranian descent, Saddam has vigorously repressed the main Shia opposition organization—Al Dawa—during the past four years. The most savage phase of the crackdown occurred during 1980 just before the war

with Iran. [redacted] Saddam had some 900 Shias executed and 2,000 others imprisoned in the spring of 1980 in response to a spate of Dawa terrorist attacks. The crackdowns were not random [redacted] Security officials deliberately directed their efforts against actual or potential Iraqi Shia leaders such as teachers, professional people, and students. In our judgment, the regime was attempting to wipe out any home-grown Iraqi Shia dissident movement before it could gather momentum. [redacted]

A diplomatic source in Baghdad, assessing the severity of Iraq's crackdown during this period, claimed that the government seized any Shia who might possibly be involved in militant activity. Consequently, by 1980 a large proportion of the politically active element of the Shia community had been crushed, according to the diplomat. [redacted]

Perhaps the most significant example of Iraqi determination to destroy the Shia opposition was the execution on 7 April 1980 of Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr Sadr, the "pope" of Iraq's Shias. The Shia spiritual leader was strangled in prison, along with his sister. Although the execution could have provided a rallying point for Iraqi Shias, the regime apparently decided that a dead Ayatollah was less a menace than a potential Khomeini, according to US diplomats.

[redacted] Baghdad used the execution of Baqr Sadr to drive home to the Iraqi Shias that the regime was prepared to use brute force to control the situation. The execution also demonstrated to Iraqi Shias that Iran could not protect its supporters inside Iraq, [redacted]

[redacted] many Dawa activists fled to northern Iraq in late 1980. Many of these activists, we believe, have since moved on to Iran. Other activists fled to Arab states in the Gulf, where they have been vigorously pursued by Iraqi security services. [redacted] fugitives have been apprehended by Iraqi security teams in the Gulf states, then drugged and spirited

<sup>3</sup> Such mass expulsions of Iranians living in Iraq are not unusual. In the early 1970s Iraq expelled some 60,000 Shias of Iranian origin when relations between Baghdad and the Shah deteriorated. [redacted]

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### *The Shia Opposition*

*The Dawa, or Islamic Call Party, the first organized Shia political party in Iraq, came into being in the 1960s. The party's founders included the late Ayatollahs Muhammad Baqr Sadr and Muhsin al-Hakim. The party is firmly opposed to the secular Ba'thist government in Baghdad and claims up to 40,000 members, but this almost certainly is an exaggeration.* [redacted] *estimate the party's membership at about 1,000.* [redacted]

*In the early 1970s, Mahdi and Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, sons of Muhsin al-Hakim, dominated Dawa. Mahdi fled to Iran in 1970 after a harsh crackdown on dissidence inside Iraq. The eldest al-Hakim brother subsequently settled in London, where he founded the Rabita al-Ahl al-Bayt (the People's Bond), a group advocating Western-style parliamentary democracy in Iraq dominated by Shias, according to diplomatic sources. This puts him in opposition to Khomeini's plan of replacing the Ba'th with an Iranian-controlled theocracy.* [redacted]

*In December 1982, Khomeini established a Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq to rule in Baghdad once Saddam was defeated. Khomeini chose Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim to lead the Council.*

[redacted] *Khomeini*

*back to Iraq for trial and execution. As recently as last year, the Iraqis tried unsuccessfully to force Kuwait to hand over an Iraqi Shia dissident.* [redacted]

*In addition, Baghdad's security services use threats against relatives still inside Iraq to influence Shia activists abroad. For example, in April 1983 the Dawa Party was implicated in two terrorist bombings in Baghdad. In reaction, Saddam ordered the arrest of 70 members of the al-Hakim family and a month later executed six of them. According to US diplomats in Baghdad, the regime then sent the 75-year-old father of two of the dead prisoners to Tehran to tell*

*believed that only the al-Hakim name could attract wide support among Iraqi Shias.* [redacted]

*[redacted] Khomeini's formation of the Council split the Iraqi exile community. Elements of the Iraqi opposition claimed the Council was too subservient to Iran and that Muhammad Baqr had sacrificed the autonomy of the Iraqi Shia opposition movement by agreeing to become the Council's head.*

*Currently, the Iraqi Shia opposition is split three ways. The conservative London group headed by Mahdi* [redacted]

*In Tehran, Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim continues to work closely with Khomeini. Finally, remnants of the Dawa Party who oppose Iranian domination of the Iraqi Shia community largely are ignored by Iran's mullahs.* [redacted]

*We believe the present disarray within the Iraqi Shia opposition is a major factor in the ineffectiveness of the movement inside Iraq. There has not been a significant sabotage operation inside Iraq tied to the Iraqi Shia opposition since April 1983. Individual Iraqi Dawa members, however, have been involved in Shia terrorist attacks outside Iraq.* [redacted]

*the al-Hakim brothers that more family members would be executed if additional bombings occurred. This threat combined with the rigorous suppression of Dawa inside Iraq apparently has worked, as there have been no major bombings since then.* [redacted]

*The Shia opposition appears not to have recovered from the Iraqi crackdown. According to US diplomats in Baghdad, the Shia opposition leadership and the formal organization inside Iraq have been virtually eliminated.* [redacted]

### Extending Carrots to Moderate Shias

While pursuing his ruthless crackdown on Shia militants, Saddam also sought to conciliate the Shia community at large. Saddam's efforts, in our judgment, are twofold: to co-opt Iraq's Shia clerics and to provide opportunities for Shias to advance within Iraq's political and economic systems. [REDACTED]

Unlike the Shah, Saddam attempts to limit the independent income of Iraqi clerics so they cannot sponsor subversive activities. Following the Shia demonstrations in 1977, Saddam took steps to make all Shia religious leaders state employees. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This status was formalized in law in 1981. Although presented as an act of government benevolence to improve the lot of Shia clerics, the net effect of Saddam's actions has been to make Iraqi clerics partly dependent on the government for their support. Most contributions to Shia clerics and shrines become the property of the state to be doled out by the government to various clerics and religious institutions. This arrangement gives the government immense power in dealing with the clerical leadership and provides Iraqi clerics with a vested interest in the survival of the regime. [REDACTED]

Saddam also has made a major effort to buy clerical loyalties over the past four years by upgrading and improving mosques and shrines throughout the Shia areas of the country. US diplomats who visited An Najaf and Karbala in May 1983 noted a considerable amount of restoration and construction activity under way at shrines and mosques in both cities. Iraqi press reports indicate that important tombs and the minarets of major mosques are being gilded and courtyards repaved with marble. Much of this is portrayed in the Iraqi press as a direct result of the benevolence of Iraqi President Saddam Husayn, who often is pictured at prayer in these mosques. [REDACTED]

Whether or not Saddam's newfound piety and benevolence have convinced most Shias is impossible to assess, but his control of Shia clerics has paid dividends. Throughout the war, leading Iraqi Shia clerics have sent him public telegrams of support. In addition, Saddam periodically has used Shia clerics to organize international Islamic conferences to call for peace and to excoriate Iran's intransigence as un-Islamic. [REDACTED]



Saddam visiting peasants [REDACTED]

Baghdad Observer ©

[REDACTED]

**Economic Benefits.** Saddam also has aimed a considerable portion of Iraq's development program at the Shias in an effort to sustain their loyalties. With massive financial inflows from its Arab backers, Iraq has been able to carry on major development projects, even though the war with Iran has badly depleted Iraq's cash reserves. Many of the showcase development projects Saddam continues to push are in Shia areas. According to press reports, Saddam has rebuilt Baghdad's al Thawrah slums, where over a million Shias live, and renamed it Saddam City. He also has approved a \$400 million water treatment facility in Al Basrah, a major Shia city, according to press reports. In An Najaf, Saddam has ordered the rebuilding of the old market, the development of parks, and the widening of streets. The Baghdad-Umm Qasr railroad that will pass through Shia areas and a large irrigation project near An Nasiriyah are still slated to go forward. [REDACTED]

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### **Propagandizing Iraqi Shias**

*Iran's appeals to Iraqi Shias have been successfully blunted in part by Baghdad's own astute propaganda. To offset the religious appeal of Iran's propaganda, Baghdad has evoked themes of Arabness, stressing the great Arab victories over the Persians in the early days of Islam. For example, Iraq's Defense Minister labels the Iranians "envious Shuubists" after a group of Persian Muslims who disputed Arab leadership of Islam following the death of the Prophet. Saddam describes the war as the Battle of Qadisiyah after the famous Arab Muslim victory over the Persians 1,300 years ago. Baghdad has also played up the theme that it is fighting to prevent a Persian conquest of Arab Iraq. At the beginning of Iran's most recent major offensive, Saddam told a crowd of Iraqi Shias that the Iranians want to place the "yoke of slavery and captivity around the necks of your women, daughters, sisters, and mothers."* [redacted]

*These appeals have had a profound effect upon Iraqi Shias.* [redacted]

[redacted] *there is serious concern among many Iraqi Shia leaders that Iran sees the war as a historic opportunity to take over all of Iraq.*

[redacted] *this Iraqi fear of Persian domination has even caused serious differences between Dawa and its Iranian supporters.* [redacted]

[redacted] *Iraq also has played on the fear of Iraqi Shia clerics that they would be relegated to a secondary role if Iran succeeds in overthrowing the Iraqi Government. Khomeini contributed to the concerns of Iraqi clerics and facilitated Iraqi propaganda by publicly arguing in 1980 that the center of Shia religious authority should be transferred from An Najaf in Iraq, where it has resided for over a thousand years, to Iran. Khomeini's assertion was publicly rejected by Iraqi clerics as a blatant Iranian power grab and heresy.* [redacted]

Saddam also has raised the pay of the lowest ranking civil servants and soldiers, most of whom are Shias. He has instituted a welfare system for elderly and disabled Iraqis and has imposed price controls and

*Grand Ayatollah Abd al-Qasim Musavi-Khoi, who is the senior Shia cleric in Iraq, is regarded by many Shia scholars as the foremost religious authority of the sect, senior even to Khomeini. Khoi, who is about 92 years old, does not believe that clerics should be directly involved in politics. In our judgment, Khoi probably regards Khomeini's insistence on the fusion of religion and politics as heresy, and he generally has been seen as at least tacitly supporting Baghdad. This perception has greatly aided Saddam's regime in its efforts to propagandize the Iraqi Shias. Khomeini sent Khoi a message of condolence this summer on the occasion of his son's death, suggesting that the Iranian leader has come to recognize his rival's continued importance.* [redacted]

*Although Khomeini spent 15 years in An Najaf and studied for a time under Khoi, his personal relations with the Iraqi clergy were not good. As early as 1968,*

[redacted] *Ayatollah Khomeini had lost much of his prestige among Iraqi Shias and was regarded as inferior to Khoi and two other Iraqi religious leaders. US diplomats in 1970 noted that Khomeini had made numerous enemies among the Iraqi Shia clergy who had experienced firsthand his many personal foibles and intractable personality.* [redacted]

*The misgivings of Khoi and other Iraqi clerics concerning Khomeini almost certainly have been reinforced by the defection to Baghdad this year of Ali Tehrani, a middle-level Iranian cleric and brother-in-law of Iran's President. Tehrani's accusations of Iranian clerical misconduct have received wide play in Iraqi internal propaganda.* [redacted]

increased subsidies for basic goods and services. [redacted] *Iraqi Shia activists believe these moves are aimed at undercutting Shia opposition among the lower classes.* [redacted]

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Saddam at prayer

**Shia Political Gains.** Besides economic benefits, Saddam has provided the Shias with tangible political gains. In 1979 he publicly announced plans to convert the formerly elitist Ba'th Party into a mass movement and called upon all Iraqis to join the organization. Subsequently he has toured the country urging Iraqis to become members. Although Saddam has not specifically appealed for Shia membership in the Ba'th, his move has most affected the Shia community since Sunni Arabs already were heavily represented in the party. [redacted] until the early 1970s the Ba'th was 90-percent Sunni Arab and that Sunnis held all leadership posts.<sup>5</sup> [redacted]

Shias have been quick to take advantage of Saddam's offer. A US diplomat in Baghdad noted in the late 1970s that lucrative careers were opening in the bureaucracy because of the oil boom. The Shias, the diplomat noted, equated party membership with access to those careers. Several government bureaucracies such as the diplomatic and security services, as well as certain senior military schools and the College of Education, are closed to candidates unless they are members of the party. A Ba'th Party card is virtually

<sup>5</sup> The Kurds—the other significant minority—as non-Arabs have not been encouraged to become members of the Ba'th Party. [redacted]

a ticket to the middle class, and, according to a US diplomat, the Shias are determined to rise in the system. [redacted]

Although there is no information on the exact percentage of Shias in the Ba'th Party, [redacted] since 1979 the party has recruited extensively among the sect. [redacted] the membership of the party at as many as 1 million in mid-1983, with Shias believed to be enrolled in proportion to their numbers in the population. [redacted] the party has about 40,000 core members, mostly Sunnis, in the upper ranks. [redacted] we estimate that the party may have as many as 500,000 Shia members, mostly concentrated in the party's lower ranks. [redacted]

Perhaps in recognition of the increasing numbers of Shias in the party, Saddam overhauled its Regional Command—the party's governing body—in 1982 and appointed seven new members, six of whom were Shias. The positions of real power on the Regional Command are still held by Sunnis, and the newly appointed Shias are all technocrats, but for the first time since 1963 Shias form a majority—eight out of 15—of Regional Command members. [redacted]

The largest visible concentration of Shias in the governmental structure is in the National Assembly. Saddam created the Assembly in 1979, at the same time that he announced the expansion of the Ba'th Party, and specifically solicited Shia candidates for the body.<sup>6</sup> A Western scholar estimates that some 40 percent of Assembly seats are held by Shias. The same scholar estimates that 50 percent of those Shias who ran for the Assembly did so as Ba'th Party members. Although the Assembly is largely a rubber-stamp organization, it provides Shias with a highly visible symbol of their integration into Iraqi society. It also provides individual Shias who are successful in achieving Assembly seats with important sources of patronage. Assembly elections are scheduled to be

<sup>6</sup> In his appeal Saddam did not use the term Shias. Rather, he asked for candidates from the tawa'if (sects). The largest sect in Iraq is the Shia. [redacted]

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***Saddam's Cult of Personality and the Shias***

*Before the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam initiated an intense publicity campaign to personalize his rule. The thrust of this continuing campaign is directed in large part at the Shias. For example, Saddam visits Shia slum quarters in Baghdad, prays at Shia mosques, and has held a banquet for Shia religious leaders, according to diplomatic sources in Baghdad.* [redacted]

*The cult of personality has been intensified during the war. Saddam promotes himself as the ingenious planner of Iraq's military victories, the inspiration to troops at the front, and the mainstay of home front morale. Western reporters claim that the cult is pervasive—Saddam T-shirts and watches are on sale throughout Iraq, and his portraits are seen everywhere.* [redacted]

*Shias welcome the attention that Saddam bestows upon them, according to diplomats in Baghdad. According to a Western scholar, Saddam appears to*

*have tapped an instinctual response among the Shias, a sect long noted for adulating its leaders. The diplomats claim that the Shias respond to all aspects of the personality cult, but in particular to Saddam's apparently impromptu visits to their districts. During these visits, Saddam mingles with the Shias, listens to their complaints, embraces their children, and generally behaves like a Western politician, according to US diplomats.* [redacted]

*Shia enthusiasm for Saddam continues despite the hardships of war. A Western ambassador who visited the Shia city of Najaf claimed to have witnessed 64 funerals of war dead in an hour and a half. Yet, when Saddam toured the streets of An Najaf shortly after the ambassador's visit, the Shias greeted his motorcade with seemingly genuine enthusiasm.* [redacted]

*Al Basrah, Iraq. Poster of Saddam Husayn* [redacted]



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held sometime before the end of the year, which may give the Shias an opportunity to increase further their strength in the Assembly.<sup>7</sup> [redacted]

**Shias in the Military.** The armed forces also have proved to be a major vehicle for integrating the Shias into the Iraqi mainstream. Before the war the military services numbered approximately 390,000 men. The war has caused their number to nearly double to over 700,000. Another 750,000 men and women serve part-time in militia units, according to Iraqi press reports. [redacted]

The increase in military manpower has been possible only because large numbers of Shia personnel are being inducted into the services; [redacted]

[redacted] many Kurds have been released from service as a political concession. Before the war, US diplomats estimated that 60 percent of enlisted men, 80 percent of noncommissioned officers, and 40 percent of officers were Shias. We estimate that about 70 percent of the current military is Shia—approximately 80 percent of the enlisted men and noncommissioned officers—meaning that approximately 500,000 Shias are serving in regular units with perhaps another 140,000 on active duty at the front with militia units. [redacted]

Although Shias are underrepresented in the officer ranks, some Shias hold key positions in the military. Three of Saddam's top military advisers, Generals Abd al-Jabar Asadi and Ismail Tayih Nu'aymi, members of the President's Military Advisory Committee, and Mahmud Shukr Shahin, head of the Directorate of Military Intelligence, are Shias. [redacted]

[redacted] Although we have no accurate information on the religious affiliation of the commanders of Iraq's 31 divisions, in early 1983 six of the 15 known division commanders were Shias. [redacted]

The military has experienced occasional problems with its Shia military personnel. Before the war several Shia officers were purged, and 30 to 40 Shia officers and enlisted men suspected of opposing the government were executed. [redacted]

<sup>7</sup> The scholar also discovered that the Kurds did not send a single Ba'th Party member to the Assembly. The three Kurdish provinces in northern Iraq all voted for independent candidates. [redacted]

[redacted] During the early stages of the conflict, however, only a few hundred military personnel had to be arrested for refusing to fight Iran. [redacted]

The most trying period for the loyalty of Baghdad's Shia troops occurred between March and July 1982. During that period Iran pushed Iraq out of Khuzestan, inflicting two major defeats on Iraqi forces and capturing some 45,000 Iraqi prisoners, many of whom probably were Shias. [redacted]

[redacted] signs of war weariness in Iraqi ranks, and there were several instances of mass surrenders. When the Iranians invaded east of Basrah in July 1982, however, Iraq's Shia troops fighting on their own soil refused to crack. Moreover, General Sa'di Tu'ma al-Jabburi, the Iraqi commander who defeated the Iranians at Al Basrah in July 1982, is himself a Shia. [redacted] Jabburi now commands Iraqi forces along the Shatt al Arab. [redacted]

#### Outlook

A major Shia revolt appears remote as long as the Iranians cannot win a decisive victory and Saddam remains alive. The Iraqi Shia opposition is disorganized, and diplomatic sources suggest that its leaders fear that their organizations have been extensively penetrated by the Iraqi security services. Baghdad's ability this spring to round up a network of Shia dissidents who were planning to attack the Foreign Ministry and several diplomatic missions in Baghdad, its rapid discovery in February of eight arms caches smuggled into Iraq by Shia dissidents operating out of Syria, and its apparent foreknowledge of the Dawa bombings in Kuwait in December 1983 suggest that Iraqi security has good sources in the Shia opposition. [redacted]

The evidence also suggests that Dawa has been unable to rebuild its extensive network inside Iraq because of the continuing security crackdown. As a result, the Iraqi Shia opposition probably will be unable to carry out more than isolated bombings and assassinations during the next few years. [redacted]

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**Shias in Saddam's Government**

*In June 1982 the ninth congress of Iraq's Ba'th Party appointed seven new members, six Shias and one Sunni, to the Regional Command. All were longtime members of the Ba'th and had been imprisoned at least once for Ba'thist activities. Five of them had subsequently distinguished themselves in mass mobilization work among the Shias.* [redacted]

*The Sunni, **Samir Muhammad Abd al-Wahab al-Shaykhli**, is viewed as a hero by the over 1 million Shias of Baghdad's al Thawrah quarter, once considered to be both the worst slum in the Middle East and a center of antigovernment sentiment. During Shaykhli's tenure as mayor of Baghdad (1980-82), the area was redeveloped, upgrading the living standards of the Shia residents. US diplomats say that his administrative talents, success in al Thawrah, and history of party activity—he has been a member since he was 19—led to his appointment to the Regional Command.* [redacted]

*In describing the Shias appointed to the Regional Command, diplomatic sources indicated that **Muhammad Hamza al-Zubaydi** played an important role in containing Dawa in the Shia-dominated southern provinces. As secretary of the Southern Organization Bureau of the Ba'th from 1979 until 1982, he devised a successful propaganda campaign against the Dawa and used security services ruthlessly in suspect areas. As of 1983 Zubaydi was secretary of the Central Peasants and Central Vocational Bureaus in the Regional Command. **Abd al-Hasin Rahi Fir'awn** and **Mazban Kadr Hadi** belong to the powerful Fatlah tribe of Shias and have effectively governed Shia-populated regions on the military front with Iran. Diplomatic sources report that **Abd al-Ghani Abd al-Ghafur** is a rising star in the Ba'th Party. As secretary of the Basrah Branch Command*

*of the Ba'th (1978-82) and Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (1982), he gained considerable experience in dealing with Shias. He currently is secretary of the Southern Organization Bureau of the party.* [redacted]

***Sa'dun Hammadi** has been Minister of State in the Presidential Office since January 1983. Minister of Oil and Minerals (1969-74) and of Foreign Affairs (1975-83), he is valued by the President for his past service and insight into international affairs, according to US diplomats. They add that he is devoutly religious. **Sa'di Mahdi Salih**, secretary of the Northern Organization Bureau, is from Saddam's hometown of Tikrit. We know little about him.* [redacted]

*Other highly visible Shias in Saddam's government are **Hasan Ali**, Minister of Trade (since 1977); **Na'im Hamid Haddad**, Speaker of the National Assembly (since 1980); and **Ahmad Husayn Samarra'i**, Chief of the President's Cabinet (since January 1984). The three men are close associates of Saddam, and Ali and Haddad are longtime members of the Revolutionary Command Council, Iraq's highest government body, and of the Regional Command. US diplomats in Baghdad report that in recent years Saddam has given them greater prominence and responsibilities. Ali has recently participated in numerous trade missions to Europe, Asia, and South America. In 1983 the diplomats reported that Haddad was considered to be the senior Shia in the ruling hierarchy. The diplomats claimed that, although he has little influence in the government, he has been mentioned as a possible successor to the Deputy Prime Minister. Since 1980 Samarra'i has risen quickly from Under Secretary in the Foreign Ministry to his current position.* [redacted]



*Samir Muhammad Abd al-Wahab al-Shaykhli* ☐

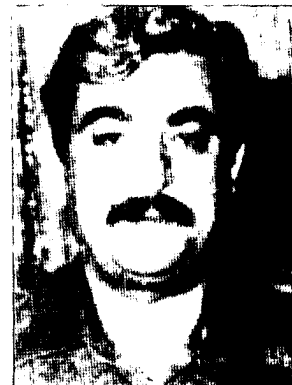


*Baghdad Observer* ©

*Muhammad Hamza al-Zubaydi* ☐



*Abd al-Hasin Rahi Fir'awn* ☐



*Baghdad Observer* ©

*Mazban Kadr Hadi* ☐

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*Sa'dun Hammadi* ☐



*Hasan Ali* ☐



*Na'im Hamid Haddad* ☐



*Wideworld* ©

*Ahmad Husayn Samarra'i* ☐

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Baghdad's willingness to assimilate the Shias into both the Ba'th Party and the military also augurs well for the regime's stability. Saddam's opening to the Shias, in our judgment, has wrought something of a revolution in Iraq's political life. Many Iraqi Shias now have an important stake in the present regime and probably hope to preserve it from an Iranian takeover and ensure that it is not replaced by a more repressive Sunni regime. In essence, Saddam has used the Shias to broaden the base of his regime, thus freeing himself from heavy dependence on the military. Saddam can now count on the mass of the Shia community in addition to the 25 percent of the population that is Sunni Arab. [ ]

A key to the regime's continued success in courting the Shias probably will be the country's economic situation. The regime needs to increase oil exports so that it can continue economic development projects and avoid an adverse economic impact in the Shia community that could provide Dawa with new recruits. The recent agreement to build a pipeline that will enable Iraq to export oil through Saudi Arabia should provide Baghdad with sufficient revenues to head off economic discontent. Moreover, the induction of large numbers of Shias into the military provides additional money to the Shia community. [ ]

We believe that when the war ends—assuming that the Iraqi President survives—Saddam will continue his efforts to cultivate ties with the Shias. Both Saddam and the Shias share a common postwar goal. Saddam has stated in numerous speeches that he seeks to rebuild Iraq as soon as possible after the conflict. As the country's blue-collar workers and peasants, the Shias will be needed to assist in the country's recovery. The Shias, too, according to diplomatic sources, are eager to see prosperity return to Iraq. [ ]

On the other hand, if Saddam is assassinated or overthrown in a coup, we believe the Shias will not automatically support his successor. In our view, the Shias have something of a personal compact with Saddam. It is his charisma that they respect and his economic policies that they have benefited from so far [ ]

We believe it would be particularly difficult for a Sunni military successor to legitimize his rule over the Shias. The worst period for the Shias in modern Iraq occurred after the death of Kassem in 1963 when a succession of military rulers governed Iraq and ignored the Shia masses. Shias probably would remember that all of Iraq's previous military rulers tried to form unions with neighboring Arab states. We believe the Shias view pan-Arabism as anti-Shia because in any such scheme they would be submerged in a sea of Sunnis. Iraqi Shias, therefore, probably would resent the return of Army rule to Iraq and would be more susceptible to Iranian subversion. [ ]

#### Implications

The Iraqi experience suggests that Iran's ability to successfully export its revolution is limited. Saddam's ruthless use of power combined with astute ethnic politics have succeeded in countering radical appeals from Tehran for a Shia revolution. At the same time, Iraqi tactics are probably not transferable to the Gulf—none of the Gulf regimes has an internal security service as ruthless or effective as Iraq. A strong Iraq, however, will serve as a check on Iranian ambitions, thus furthering US objectives in the Gulf so long as a radical clerical regime is in power in Iran. [ ]

Following the war, Saddam will need stability to ensure that Western investment will flow to Iraq. Western bankers and industrial firms almost certainly would be wary of investing in a country torn by civil strife. We believe the Shias also desire stability when the war ends, since they have suffered much from the fighting. Similarly, the Shias are not likely to support an aggressive Iraqi policy toward the moderate Arab states of the Gulf, since many Iraqi Shia merchants have ties to Shia merchants in the Gulf, with whom they probably hope to expand trade when the war ends. [ ]

Immediately after the war—and probably for at least a few years—Iraq, with Saddam in control and backed by the Shias, should be a stabilizing force in the Gulf region. Nonetheless, as Iraq grows stronger, its neighbors almost certainly will come to fear it, and this could lead to increased regional tensions. [ ]

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